

**The Highland Council  
Central Safety Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held REMOTELY on Friday 13 November, 2020 at 1.00 p.m.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mr D Louden  
Mr G MacKenzie  
Mr A MacKinnon

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr D Griffiths, GMB  
Mr I Macleman, UNITE/UCATT

**In attendance:**

Mr M Rodgers, ECO Housing & Property  
Ms E Barrie, Interim Head of HR  
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager  
Mr T Murdison, Acting Property Manager  
Ms T Urry, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Mr B Porter, Education and Learning, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Mr F MacDonald, Environment & Infrastructure, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Ms D Sutherland, Resources & Finance, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Mr A Yates, Communities and Places, Health & Safety Wellbeing Co-ordinator  
Ms D Ferguson, Ross, Skye, Lochaber, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr C Howell, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross, Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

**Also in Attendance:-**

Ms A Watters, Spectrum Life (Item 4 only)

**SUBJECT/DECISION**

**ACTION**

**1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair**

Members were advised that, in terms of the remit of the Committee, following an election of councillors, and annually thereafter, the Committee shall appoint from amongst their members a Chair and Vice Chair. If the Chair appointed be one of the Employer's representatives, the Vice-Chair shall be one of the Staff Side representatives and vice versa.

Mr D Griffiths, seconded by Mr I Macleman, moved that Mr A MacKinnon be appointed as Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr A MacKinnon was duly appointed.

Mr A MacKinnon, seconded by Mr D Louden, moved that Mr D Griffiths be appointed as Vice Chair. There being no other nominations, Mr Griffiths was duly appointed.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R Gale of the Employer's Side; Mr M Hayes, UNISON from the Staff Side; Ms H Ross, CSER and Mr R Cattle, RSL Operational Area Health and Safety Working Groups, and Ms L Denovan Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

Mr A MacKinnon and Mr I Macleman declared a non-financial interest as family members were employees of The Highland Council but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that the interest did not preclude them from taking part in the discussion at the meeting.

## **4. Employee Assistance Programme Provider – Presentation**

Aisling Watters from Spectrum Life, the Employee Assistance Programme Provider for the Council, was in attendance and provided an overview of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). It was a counselling and wellbeing support service which provided mental health support and general wellbeing support to employees and Elected Members. It was accessible by telephone and via an online portal. The service was free and it was fully confidential. The EAP service could help with work related and personal issues.

The Chairman thanked Ms Watters for the informative presentation on the EAP service. This service needed to be promoted as much as possible within the Council, as it was an important service particularly given the current Covid health crises and it was reassuring that the service was completely confidential.

The Chairman also thanked all staff for working in such challenging circumstances. The hard work and flexibility of staff had been exemplary.

In response to a query, the EAP service would provide the service user up to 6 sessions per issue raised. While the confidential aspect of the service was important, there was a concern that there was no feedback to Managers if, for example, a service user was suicidal and required direct intervention. While clarification would be sought from the EAP

team regarding the process in dealing with this issue, it was understood that if someone revealed that they were suicidal, the Council was allowed to break confidentiality and seek urgent assistance.

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation and that the presentation slides would be shared with the Committee.

## **5. Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 14 August, 2020, the terms of which were **APPROVED**, subject to the minute being amended to reflect that Mr A MacKinnon chaired the meeting.

## **6. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

Arising from the Minutes the following matter was raised:-

Homeworking issues – a communication would be issued soon to staff covering support and guidance on a number of homeworking and related issues. There had been a lot of uncertainty at the start of lockdown over how long the new working arrangements would last for. The new working arrangements had gone extremely well and the Chairman thanked the Council's IT service for all their work in enabling over 5000 employees to work from home which was a tremendous achievement.

While working from home suited some employees it did not suit everyone and some employees because of the type of job they had could not work from home. Employees had an entitlement to ensure that the Council provided them with a workplace that was safe, secure and for their wellbeing. Work had been undertaken on what Council buildings were required going forward and what a model Hub building might look like. Trade Union representatives would be involved in discussions on homeworking and related issues.

## **7. Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups**

There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of the:-

### **Area Health and Safety Groups**

- (i) Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 17 September, 2020.
- (ii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 8 October, 2020;
- (iii) Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Joint Health and Safety Working Group held on 7 October, 2020; and

## **Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups**

(iv) Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and Housing and Property Services on 6 November, 2020.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Groups and Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups Minutes.

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were considered:-

### Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 17 September, 2020

Concerns were raised in relation to building security issues at Tigh na Sgìre, Portree and there had been no progress implementing any of the identified modifications due to no budget being allocated for these works.

Further, the security of the Dingwall main Council office was compromised by having no RPO since the Ward Manager left the Council at the end of June, 2020. This issue was replicated across a few offices in the Council and progress to address RPO vacancies was required.

There were concerns raised relating to the operation of CCTV in Council premises. The Council did not provide training for the CCTV users to ensure they comply with all the statutory regulatory requirements increasing corporate reputational and staff risk.

It was highlighted that the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager had submitted a report to the Executive Leadership Team meeting next week outlining the main health and safety risks facing the Council and the lack of RPO's was on this list. It had been requested that the project to review the role and function of the RPO be reinstated.

The Committee **NOTED** that the Chairman gave an undertaking that the above issues would be considered and the outcome would be reported to a future meeting.

**OHSW  
Manager**

### Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 8 October, 2020

There had been concerns that Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) was out of date, and while some reassurance had been given from the Acting Property Manager, it was suggested that this information be issued to staff.

It was explained that there had been significant delays in PAT testing as a result of cancelling the portable appliance contract and putting a new system of testing in place. PAT testing was currently in a transition

period, there was a small holding budget for testing and staff with concerns should contact their Manager to get a PAT test.

Continuing, it was explained that legislation did not state any period of time in which equipment should be tested, but testing should be done on a risk based approach. There was a need to educate staff to check their equipment in order to identify any defects, for example, frayed cables.

It was advised that Unite the Union paid for training for employees to become a competent person for PAT testing. Six employees in Community Services had undertaken this training with a view to testing hand held tools which were the highest risk. This Staff Partnership working was commended.

It was understood that there had been a project looking at PAT testing and whether to take this inhouse by training the Council's own staff. Working with the Staff Side to deliver this would be explored.

The Committee **NOTED** that discussions would be held regarding the PAT testing programme and whether it was feasible to take this inhouse by training the Council's own staff.

**OHSW  
Manager/A  
cting  
Property  
Manager/St  
aff Side**

Communities and Places, Infrastructure and Environment and Housing and Property Services on 6 November, 2020

It had previously been decided that the higher risk Services would have their own separate health and safety meetings in order to give each Service more time to discuss health and safety issues. The lower risk Services such as Resources/Finance and Performance and Governance were to have shared meetings. An undertaking was given to look at how to take forward the previously agreed format of these meetings.

**OHSW  
Manager**

**8. Property Related Health and Safety Issues**

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/10/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

Following consideration, the Committee **NOTED** the current levels of non compliance and progress being made.

**9. Occupational Health Service Update**

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/11/20 by the Interim Head of Human Resources.

It was advised that this was a new style of report on occupational health containing comprehensive information. The report would be issued to Health and Safety Co-ordinators for consideration at Service Trade

**OHSW  
Manager/  
Head of**

Union Health and Safety Liaison Groups.. The Health and Safety Co-ordinator for the Health and Social Care Service was still to be confirmed.

## Resources

The number of management referrals had decreased since the last quarter, but the number of mental health related referrals had increased. It was also highlighted that change and demand were the main sources of stress at work. A further analysis of the reasons for this would be undertaken.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the Occupational Health activity for the last 3 months.

### 10. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/12/20 by the Executive Chief Officer Resources and Finance.

It was highlighted that most of the work in the last period was Covid-19 related. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) continued to visit premises. As part of their enforcement of Covid-19 arrangements in schools, approximately 15 Highland schools were contacted by HSE. This exercise was replicated in other Scottish Local Authorities and private schools. There were no issues raised from these initial discussions with Highland Schools, none of which were selected for in-person visits. This very positive news. It was the result of work undertaken by many stakeholders in planning for a return and the co-operation of all school staff to comply and reinforce controls.

The Chairman commended the work of staff involved in making sure Schools reopened in a safe manner.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.

The meeting ended at 2.20 p.m.